

Jordan Loewen-Colón (00:00:08):

Hello and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, Fire Keepers of the Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands. And now introducing your hosts, Philip Arnold and Sandra Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold (00:00:30):

Hi, welcome back to Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery. I'm Phil Arnold, faculty in Religion and Native American Indigenous Studies at Syracuse University and the founding director of Skä•noñh Great Law Peace Center, and the president of Indigenous Values Initiative.

Sandy Bigtree (00:00:49):

And I'm Sandy Bigtree. I'm a citizen of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. I'm a board member of the Indigenous Values Initiative and a founding member of the Academic Collaborative of Skä•noñh the Great Law of Peace Center here at Onondaga Lake.

Philip P. Arnold (00:01:07):

And we're super excited to have with us today Oren Lyons. Oren Lyons is the faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan and serves of the member of the Chiefs of the Onondaga Nation Council of Chiefs and the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Oren's also founding member, principal partner of One Bowl Productions. Oren holds the title of professor emeritus at SUNY Buffalo, has a doctor of law degree from his alma mater, Syracuse University and Lyons Hall at SU is named in his honor. Oren Lyons is an All-American Lacrosse Hall of Famer, an honorary chairman of the Haudenosaunee Nationals lacrosse team. He is an accomplished artist, environmentalist and author.

(00:01:57):

Oren is a leading voice at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples, serves as the executive committee of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Human Survival, and acts as chairman of the board for both the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and Plantagon, a world leader in greenhouse innovation. Recipient of several prestigious awards including the UN NGO World Peace Prize, the Ellis Island Congressional Medal of Honor, The Rosa Parks and George Arents Award for Environmental and Social Activism, and Sweden's prestigious Friends of the Children Award with his colleague and the late Nelson Mandela, recipient of Green Cross International Environmental Icon Awards in 2019 as well. So we're here at the Onondaga Nation, and we're just super excited to have Oren here with us today, who is one of the foremost leaders in this topic of the Doctrine of Discovery. And Oren, I'd just like to start by just asking you about how you brought this issue of the Doctrine of Discovery to the world stage at the United Nations. Can you tell us about that history and your place in it?

Oren Lyons (00:03:30):

Yeah, my memory is not as sharp as it used to be, and I could be making some mistakes in time and places. But what I remember when I first heard about this is we were in council. The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth were meeting in Indian Village in the West Coast, northwest. And there came a young man, he was very anxious and kind of agitated and nervous, and he had a lot of papers under his arms. And he said, "I've come to tell you about this." And we said, "All right. All right, calm down. You need to rest, and you need to eat," and so forth. And I said, "Tomorrow, you can address our council,"

and that was Steve Newcomb. He was a young man at that time. I remember all these papers he had under his arm, looked pretty formidable. And so he said the following day when we convened, he said that he had been working with a leader from the Lakota Nation, and they had been working on this issue.

(00:05:31):

And during the time that became informed from people in South America that the issue of this papal bull that was issued a year after the so-called discovery of the United of North America or the Western Hemisphere basically by Columbus. And he said that he had information that we should know and that he understood that we were all leading the Traditional Circle of Elders and Youth. And I think at that time it was the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders. We didn't had to use a little bit later. But at that time, we were meeting to re-energize the traditions of Native peoples in North America. And we had established a process by which we would visit different Indian territories, and that whole event began with... It was a cowboy by the name of Bob Staffanson. He was from Montana. And Bob was not only cowboy, but he was a conductor, philharmonic conductor as well, quite a combination I thought. But at the time, when we met, I had been invited to a meeting in Wisconsin, probably around '75 I think, somewhere around there.

(00:07:38):

And that the meeting that was convened by Bob, he was putting together Native people and leaders of the non-Indian sectors, of all sectors. So he asked me if I would come there, and I did. And it was an interesting meeting. It was three days and there were many, many people there. There were Native people and mostly the educated ones, and there weren't that many at that time that I knew about. But we had leaders there, and then there were a lot of non-Native people who were engineers, who were teachers, who were all part of Western life. And it was kind of a frantic three days and very interesting to me. But I wasn't really participating in, I was kind of more or less watching, trying to figure out what it is that was going on here, but it certainly was a collaboration. I mean, that was obvious between Native people and non-Native people.

(00:09:09):

So at the end of it, Bob asked me, he says, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "Oh, pretty interesting." I said, "A lot of energy here." And there were a lot of people carrying their papers and so forth and moving back around. He said, "Well, we're going to meet again next year." He says, "And we're going to meet again and would you be part of that?" And I said, "No, I don't think so." I said, "I..." And he said, "Well, why not?" I said, "I didn't see any of my people here." And he said, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "I'm talking about traditional people." People who are holding the line on traditions, language and so forth. And there were Native people there and there were several of those that I just mentioned, but not many, but mostly a lot of energy.

(00:10:08):

He said, "Well, that's what I'm looking for." He said, "I'm looking for the Native voice." He says, "I'm looking for that kind of leadership." And he explained to me what happened to him when he was exposed to that traditional style of life. He was in Canada, and he was invited by the Native people there that he was visiting to ceremonies that were exchanging a bundle, which is a big deal when you move a bundle from one keeper to the next. And he said there was a huge tipi, a huge tipi. He said there were many people in it, and he said the bundle was referring to rain. It was a part of that. Anyway, he said that the ceremony was going on by Crow. I think it was Crow, not certain right now, but-

Sandy Bigtree (00:11:27):

[inaudible 00:11:28].

Oren Lyons (00:11:28):

... northwest. Anyway, he said there was lightning and rain. "Pouring rain," he said. The ceremony was taking place. And really, he said it was really rocked his stability. He said, "I was affected by what was going on." And he said that when the ceremony was finished, which took many hours, he said he went outside and the rain that they were feeling was just around the tipi wasn't anywhere else. And he said, "So I know," he said then, "that you people," and he's referring to... When you're looking at me, you're referring to Native people. "You know stuff that we don't know," he said. "It was clear to me," he says, "and that you have observations that we need to know." He said, "If we're all going to survive as a species." And so that was how it started. And I said, "Well, I didn't see many of those people here." He said, "Well, that's the ones I want to talk to." I said, "If they care came here in this venue, they would never have said anything."

(00:13:00):

They would've just been silent and just watching because they wouldn't feel comfortable speaking to this kind of group." I said, "So even if they came here, they wouldn't say anything," much the way I was. And he said, "Well, how do you know?" I said, "I know most of them." He said, "Well, can we have a meeting?" "I don't know," I said, whether they would come to a meeting. He said, "Because the issue he said is our people..." I'm referring to white people, who are not Native people. Basic, I would say, white people. Our people don't know what you know. And they need to know because we're in serious times. I said, "Well, we know that, but I'm not sure." He said, "Well, I will pay for a gathering if you can get them together." So I said, "All I can do is ask."

(00:14:03):

So I talked to some of our traditional leaders, and they were curious about it. And they said, "Well..." On the Hopi, we talked to Hopis and the Elders there, and they said, "Do you know we have a prophecy?" They said that, at some point, our brothers are going to ask us. And it seems as though they're asking at this point, so maybe we should respond. And so with that, I kind of hope he's kind of saying, "Well, this has kind of been talked about before. Maybe this is a time we should least talk about it." So I went back, and I talked to our leaders that I knew and I said, "I have a meeting that would be convened by Staffanson in Montana." I said, "The meeting would be held at Three Forks, which was where the rivers come together, and they would pay us. They would pay for our travel and take care of the food or many." So our Elders discussed it and said, "Well, maybe we should at least talk about it."

(00:15:34):

So they took that invitation, and we did convene in 1977 at Three Forks, Montana. And at that time, we said to Bob Staffanson, "You can't participate. You can come into the camp and you can bring the food or whatever, but we're going to have the discussion that's going to be between ourselves to discuss your offer, but that will be between us and we'll let you know." So we were there for three days, and we had this long discussion. And we came to the conclusion that it was serious enough to have another discussion next year or think about this, and we convene again, and that's the way it went. So we thought about it, and we had the opportunity and Bob says, "I'll come back." So then he had also talked to the Crow Nation. They were right there, and they were very much interested in it, and so some of the Elders of the Crow and... Montana's got a lot of Indians, all kinds. So we had a fair representation and said, "We should meet again."

(00:17:21):

And this meeting went on for another year. And then finally, it seemed like we didn't have a formal, saying, "Well, now we'll go far." It's we just continued, and it became a process, and Bob always furnished... He had a group of people. He had his own group who were really serious about this discussion, and the idea was a transfer of knowledge from one of us to over there and exchange, and what we said to him was that... We said, "Our nations are in serious conditions. We've been undergoing all kinds of misfortunes, and we've gone through a lot. And basically, they're trying to get rid of us. Basically, they're trying... So how are we going to help you when we are struggling in our own ways to stay alive?"

Philip P. Arnold (00:18:31):

Right.

Oren Lyons (00:18:31):

And he said, "Well, it's very important that you do, so we'll continue to organize, and I'll support you." And we said, "At some point..." We'll come to a point where we say, "Well, let's sit down together and have this discussion." And so that's how the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth started. And that was funded all the time by Bob Staffanson and his non-Native people, and they... Serious money, I mean, because we didn't have money. The traditional people, we just didn't have any money, but we did have the foundations and the thoughts and so forth. So that's how the circle started, and it became very strong, and other Indian nations heard about it and it grew. And Bob said, "Well, we can make Three Forks the center." And I said, "You're not going to get people to come here from all over," I said. Then, we had our own discussion and we decided it would be better if we had our meetings in different sections of the country where people could gather.

(00:20:07):

And we said, "So it wouldn't be a... Three Forks wouldn't be our center home base, but Montana would with Bob." So anyway, that's how it all began. And we began holding these meetings in different parts of the country, it'd be hosted by nations who would send in ahead of time and said, "We would like to host the next meeting," and so forth. And then Bob would take care of all of the travel and so forth. It's amazing that they were consistent on this. And so it became really a large gathering, and it gave voice to the traditional people, a very great obligation through Bob Staffanson and his support group, which we tried to have a meeting. And the first meeting that we had, I think was about four or five years later, we said, "Okay, let's bring the two sides together now," and it wound up in a shouting match.

Philip P. Arnold (00:21:26):

Oh, no.

Oren Lyons (00:21:27):

Well, there's big differences in the two sides and so forth. So clearly, this wasn't going to work. So we said, "Okay, we'll continue, but instead of meeting together, we'll put out a communique." So that's where the circle of Elders communiques began. And we would talk about things that were relevant, that we thought were relevant, and that would be part of the communiques, and so those communiques were incisive, and they addressed the issues of the broad issues of humanity. And I must say, again, that all of this was being funded by this very diligent group of non-Native people. Never asked, never... And we said, "Well..." Anyway, fast-forward, 19... Let's see. 2000, finally, we got together. It was quite a long time after that we finally had a meeting together. It was a big deal, and we spent the day just in council.

(00:23:05):

They brought their leaders and our leaders. It was in Montana. And very positive, it was good to finally... But this was almost 40 years after, took that long. And so the last three meetings ago, I think, or two meetings ago now, and then unto the COVID, we didn't meet again. So we're at this point now, and the Elders of the circle, now, it's only 43 or 44 years old, I'm not certain now. And the original people in there all passed on. So just a few of us Elders in there and his group, there's only a couple of them left from the original group, but we had to maintain that. And a whole lot of younger people in there who have really no comprehension of all the work that had taken place before.

(00:24:18):

But basically, the idea was how do we work together to meet the issues of survival in a spiritual way. And Native people's spiritual rule of law is number one, and the transfer of that. They were very, very, very difficult. And so we're at a standstill at this moment now, I think, our current leaders has gone up and met with Bob's family, but not really. The group that first started out with Bob is not strong on their side. They're young, and I don't think they're focused on the survival issue like Bob was, but I'm not certain. I mean, all of this, whether a circle survives or not, I don't know.

Sandy Bigtree (00:25:40):

Was this work connected to the UN work and the Doctrine of Discovery?

Oren Lyons (00:25:49):

I think the foundational... As a speaker, the UN work is... It is part of it. It is part of it because during the early years, I would say '70, 1970, '68, '69, '70, when we were meeting... There were also things occurring in the Western life, which was very extreme in a lot of places. And so we said that part of the traditional group of the Elder Circle meeting politically, which was not part of the Elders. We said, "When you come to the Elder Circle, it's spirituality, period." No politics, we don't want politics here. They're coming here for the spiritual rejuvenation of our nations. And because any one of us, Indian nations, are up to the ears in politics of survival, and that would immediately take over everything if you opened up that. So we kept that spirituality of the Traditional Circle of Elders and Youth.

(00:27:17):

But on the other hand, we had to be active because of what was happening at the UN and how do we manage to get our voice there. And so during those meetings, there were things going on, collaborations going on with the Indigenous people. And the really very, very important one was the Elder Circle because it brought us together. And the leadership basically was coming out of Hopi and Onondaga, and that started back in 1947 when I was 17. I remember... Well, again, everything is a story, but what happened was there was a roustabout, Hopi man. There was a roustabout in one of the circuses that traveled, and they go from one town to the other and so forth. And they stopped at Syracuse, New York.

(00:28:44):

And this Hopi roustabout heard that there were Indians here. So he on his own came out to Onondaga, sure enough, he found Onondaga, and he was Hopi, which had a very strong traditional background too. And so he made a report back to the Hopi, "I found the Indians that we've been looking for," because the Hopis had said that there was Indians in the east that they were going to meet with. It's been in their prophecy for a long time. But if you're in a Hopi country, which is Arizona and so forth, east is Louisiana or Florida or whatever, and not thinking about New York, the last place. You're thinking about New York, but here we were, and here was this Hopi guy. So they set a delegation up in 1947 to just see whether this was true or not. And sure enough, here we were. And then we were holding our traditions very

strong, and so they came back again the following year, and they brought... And I remember this very well.

Jordan Loewen-Colón (00:30:11):

Do you need help catching up on today's topic or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned? If so, please check our website at podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org for more information. Now, back to the conversation.

Oren Lyons (00:30:18):

They brought a lot of snakes in the bag, and they held a snake at Onondaga to celebrate this coming together. I hope he said that to Onondaga. I remember those snakes, they were all kinds. They weren't just... But there was rattlesnakes in there.

Philip P. Arnold (00:30:54):

Oh, no. Those are serious snakes from there.

Oren Lyons (00:30:56):

But they were also the little snakes, the green snakes, the garden snakes, they were all in there.

Philip P. Arnold (00:31:01):

All snakes.

Oren Lyons (00:31:01):

And they had the ceremony out there on our grounds that surround the longhouse at Onondaga, and that became our relationship with the Hopis. And we've always kept that relationship, and the leader of that group was Thomas Banyacya. There were four people assigned by the Hopis to do this work of bringing news and reaching what he said was the House of Mica, the glass house, to bring this news of peace, basically, peace. And of course, our foundation at Haudenosaunee is a tree of peace. So the collaboration was very, very easy to make because we were both in the same position, and we understood that. And that began the coalition of what they call the Elder Circle of traveling together. And the Sixth Nations had said, "We've got to go and talk to our brothers. We have to go speak to them."

(00:32:28):

So in '60s, they had what they call the Unity Caravan, which was to unite the common traditional people. And that circle, that became the Traditional Circle. The Unity Caravan went around the country. And I made that trip in '68, even though I was one of the executives in New York City and I've been there now almost 10 years and I had been asked by the clan mother, my clan, to come home and work with the council. And that's a whole another story about it resulted in my marriage being dissolved and a conflict of interest I would say there, but I won't go into. And anyway, it was costly, but I came back and I accepted the request of my clan mother and said, "See what you can do to help." And I said, "Well, I'm not fluent in the language and certainly, not qualified to hold a title."

(00:34:03):

[inaudible 00:34:04]. I have to think about that one. I want you to move in Constable Chief. And so I did spend a year discussion and I decided, yes, I needed to come back and help. Then, so that's when I came

back from New York City and became active, and I had to learn a lot. There's so much I didn't know. And the more I learned, the broader my perspective got. And Indigenous to me, at the time, was American Indians they called us. That's the terminology, using Native Americans, so forth and so on. It was in our meeting in Geneva. As we were preparing to go to Geneva in '77 when we said, and this meeting was being held at the island off the coast of British Columbia, and that was 1975 at this meeting, and they were preparing to go to United Nations in Geneva, we said, "Well, that's where we have to get out of the box here, out of US and Canada, get overseas and talk to..."

(00:35:40):

Personally, I had this idea that there was going to be a whole different group of people over there. We get finally get to a place where you... They'll hear your voice to talk about the truth, and it'd be finally get to someplace what's going to be honored a grip of both the Canadian and US government, and there would be... Well, of course, I always use the similarity we were like Pinocchio going out there. We just not knowing really, at least for myself, how unaware we were of the world and how it's operating. So we finally worked together. We had a big gathering in '76, the anniversary, 1776 of Wounded Knee, and we were there with the Lakotas. We helped to celebrate that event, celebration or consecration, really, of all the lives lost that they were both Native and non-Native people.

(00:36:57):

And we had a good collaborative meeting about moving to the UN. We were working very diligently on that issue. We said we're going to do it next year, and so we did. And there's a lot to that I can't get into. It was just too long, but we did finally get support from Ann Maytag, the Maytag Foundation, the Maytag family. Ann, far as I could understand, was kind of an outlier in that family. And she was independent thinker, and she was supporting Native people financially, and so that's how we come in contact with her because she was going to help us finance our group going to Geneva in '77. But traditional people just didn't have the money, and she did. And I was [inaudible 00:38:18] for a history of our nation that, again, this non-Native woman, Ann Maytag, was foundational, fundamentally responsible for helping us get out of the box here. So a lot of our people are very anti-white people, and they have good reason to be.

Philip P. Arnold (00:38:43):

Sure.

Oren Lyons (00:38:43):

But there's also very, very good white people that I know and that have helped us, and Ann is one of them. And I just want to put that on a record for everybody that gets angry every time they... They got good reason to be angry with white or what, but there got a lot of good people out there. That's one of the things I found out in my travels, good people everywhere. They're there and Native people have been insulated, put on reservations. And basically, during that time in the 1800s, they were really prisons. There weren't reservations. You had to get permission to go outside. There were soldiers around keeping your... Now, people just... The history of this country is not told. And when I became a professor at the University of Buffalo, I had to learn a lot of this stuff so that I could teach a real class into real history. And that was in 1970, '71 who reformed the University of Buffalo Indian section.

(00:40:08):

And people who were responsible for that development, John Mohawk in particular, Barry White, who was his friend and cohort, and Marilyn White, who was married to Barry. Those three were really working hard to get me to be involved in the development of a broader process of Indian support. And I

was an artist trying to make my way as an artist. And I said, "This is not what I was planning to do with my life," and they were very persistent. And at the same time, I was beginning to travel with the Elder Circle and the Six Nation Coalition. And I began to see my interest was moving further away, I could... And then of course, the Onondaga Council wanted me to come on council as a leader. He wanted a chief, so I did. I did accept that after a year of consideration. And the clan mother said, "Well, I think you can do something for us." She said, "I think you need what you can do. Don't worry. Well, do your best." That's all she said, "Do the best, that's all you can do."

(00:41:52):

And she was a very good leader, and she didn't waste any time. Once I said, "Okay, I'll try." I said, "Probably need some help. We need some younger guys." So once I agreed, I went up. Along with my clan mother, I went up to talk to Irv Powless Jr., who was my... We grew up together. I said, "Irv, I work with the Council of Chiefs." No way, because his father was a Beaver. Father was one of the chief. I said, "No, they never honed. They worked hard. They're all..." I said, "No." So we convinced him, "Oh, okay." So I said, "We need another guy." So we went, and we got Paul Waterman. And Paul, we need it because he was fluent in six languages, but he grew up with us, so he was part of us. And so we went to Paul and just soon as he walked in the door pauses, "No way. No way," he says, right? He shook his head that way. Oh, it took us couple days to finally convinced him, so the three of us went on the council.

(00:43:10):

So we kind of rejuvenated and added new blood to the council, that was what the clan mother was after. So now, there was Bill Lazor who was younger than we were but on the council before. So we had a coalition of young blood on there. That was very important, and we had a lot of energy so forth. So we did a lot of work. The council became very, very... And they were active anyway, we had gone around a country. It was a Unity Caravan. Now, we had the Elder Circle. And we were building a strong coalition of traditional people, the traditions and the principle set that traditional people had, which is foundational today's... If we're going to survive as a species, we got to get back to those principles, which is basically taking care of nature, so nature taking care of us, and understanding that if we don't protect what nature is doing for us then we will suffer the consequence.

(00:44:23):

People are saying, "Well, we have to save the world," as I said. I finally come to realize you can't save the world. The world will just keep on going. You're going to be gone long time. The world ain't going anywhere. You're not going to save any world. But what about the people out it? I said, "That's who you're going to worry about." And not saving the world, you're saving the people. And the people better understand the world, nature don't care. Nature got all the time in the world. We can disappear, [inaudible 00:44:55] going to bother them at all. Maybe 5,000 years later, there be another group. The world will be here, been here for a long time, and it ain't going anywhere. But people, yeah, we can be gone. And it looks like we're working in that direction right now very much.

(00:45:15):

Instead of together, we got a war going on in Ukraine. Terrible, going a hundred miles an hour in the wrong direction, a hundred miles an hour. All that work that people did to bring the earth to some kind of a safer place has been just showed away every day by bombs and battles going on by this leader, so-called leader. He is a leader in Russia. Now, I don't think China agrees with that, and I don't think anybody agrees with what he's doing, but there he is. And then of course, all the bad things that the US have done over a period of years, that's coming home to roost now too, all the way around. But from a bigger perspective, the way I see it, human beings are like fleas on a dog. There's just a bunch of fleas on a dog. And when that dog shakes, the fleas are gone. That's us, dogs going to be there. And that's

nature, that's the earth itself. It ain't going anywhere, but we may be, and so here we are. And I think this is the gist of your discussion today.

Philip P. Arnold (00:46:37):

If we could get back to... So I think it was '92, I think you might have said. 1992 when Steve made that trip to the circle of Elder, something like that.

Oren Lyons (00:46:47):

Yeah, yeah. I think it was '92. Yeah, here he come. And so he presented to the Elders, our circle. He presented what he had been hearing from South America. There were Native people working out of the West Coast of South America on this issue of the doctrine. That's where it was coming from. They were the ones that they had started way before we were up here, and he had contact with them. And that was the information that Steve was bringing to us was the genesis was coming out of South America and the West Coast in particular. And so when he brought that, we said, "Yes. Yes, this is extremely relevant," and so forth. And so we had contact at that point with the federal government in 1992 was the 500th anniversary of the landfall of Christopher Columbus.

Philip P. Arnold (00:48:08):

Right. '92?

Oren Lyons (00:48:09):

'92, and so it was a big year. And we had been at the UN, since '94 actually, and really had put into our position at the UN in '94. And it's been the longest standing discussion at the United Nation of any issue by far. So what was under discussion? And we kept saying, "Well, how long you going to have the discussion? What about us? What about us," and so forth and so on. Our presentation that we made formally in '92, and we said, "This should be celebrating the meeting of Native people and Columbus, we should be focusing on the Native peoples part of that meeting," at the UN.

(00:49:24):

And we had been at the UN for some time now, and we had been working hard and getting our statement made, and they kept putting it off, but this brought it all to a head. And it was interesting to me that at that very same time, a man by the name of Tom Murrell, who non-Native, a very wealthy person, was working with Native people from State of Washington, helping the fishing people and bought them a boat to fish. And the fishing fight that had been going on, and we had gone through part of it. We were out there during those battles and up and down the West Coast, in Alcatraz, our contingent stopped at... Clan mothers were climbing up the wall of Alcatraz, our clan mothers were in Alcatraz.

Philip P. Arnold (00:50:34):

Wow.

Oren Lyons (00:50:36):

Yes. Wow, it was right. You just don't know.

Philip P. Arnold (00:50:40):

That's in the '70s or '90s?

Sandy Bigtree (00:50:40):
'92, '90.

Oren Lyons (00:50:40):
Yeah, '70s.

Philip P. Arnold (00:50:40):
'70s.

Oren Lyons (00:50:43):
Yeah, they were in Alcatraz. It was '68. I think they took over '69, Alcatraz, '70, '71.

Philip P. Arnold (00:50:59):
Right, '70, I think. Yeah.

Oren Lyons (00:51:00):
So we were coming through, I think '70 or '69. I'm not sure, but on our way to Hopi. And that was the Unity Caravan, which is now, but the whole that we were. And I remember our clan mothers climbing up the walls of a prison and the leader there was a Mohawk.

Philip P. Arnold (00:51:25):
Yeah.

Oren Lyons (00:51:28):
Yeah, young man. Trying to remember his name now.

Philip P. Arnold (00:51:32):
Oh, gosh.

Oren Lyons (00:51:39):
Anyway, he's the one that was a leader, was young people there. John Trudell was there, just a young kid when we came in, but they were so glad when the Elders came. They just brought them and... Just brought some stability to them.

Philip P. Arnold (00:52:05):
Richard Oakes.

Oren Lyons (00:52:06):
Richard Oakes had a tragic life, shot and killed by a sheriff. Nothing ever done about it, just shot and killed. And we went over and we buried him. And young Lazor and myself and one of our Elder chiefs,

went over and did the burial. We were very active during those years. I didn't think much about it. We're just doing what had to be done.

Philip P. Arnold (00:52:48):

Yeah.

Oren Lyons (00:52:49):

It's historic now, but not which people know about it. We don't have time to write things down because everything is happening all the time. It just made... It's like swimming. You got to keep swimming or else you're going to drown. So it needs to be documented very carefully, all of these events.

Philip P. Arnold (00:53:21):

So Steve was bringing this message from South America, which is very interesting, I think. And this work, I mean, one of the things about the doctrine of discovery is it really does crystallize the whole problem in a way.

Oren Lyons (00:53:40):

Yeah, nobody knows about it or knew about it at the time, but it was a papal bull. I was authorized by a pope.

Philip P. Arnold (00:53:54):

Nicholas, or which one? Oh, Alexander.

Oren Lyons (00:53:57):

Alexander, yeah. The second.

Philip P. Arnold (00:54:01):

The Borja Pope.

Oren Lyons (00:54:02):

Yep. Alexander II that he was a... And it was just part of their hegemony and just added another piece of... They were just taking all parts of the world. And it was a pope that said, "Well, now we're taking over North Central and South America Western Hemisphere." He didn't stop at one place. He said the whole hemisphere, but that was their style, their thinking. And of course, you had very formidable people here on this side who didn't agree with that and still don't, and the battle is still going on. And I think that Christianity has taken a hard hit, which it should take all the damage it's done to people around the world and just the boarding schools, so-called boarding schools that they're finding Native people that weren't there for one day or a week. They were there for years. They weren't boarding schools. They were institutions of mind.

Philip P. Arnold (00:55:24):

Brainwashing.

Oren Lyons (00:55:25):

Brainwashing. They were brainwashing institutions, basically. They're not... Show me any school that has graveyards.

Philip P. Arnold (00:55:33):

Yeah.

Oren Lyons (00:55:35):

Show me one school that has graveyards.

Philip P. Arnold (00:55:37):

Right.

Oren Lyons (00:55:38):

And all of those places have graveyards of our children. Never came home, taken by force from their families and brainwashed but didn't work altogether. We're still here. And now, it's swinging back around to reality. Christianity is now coming under indictment for all the damage you've done. The history of the popes themselves is astonishing once you get into it and find out how terrible they were. And so I guess the reality is how do you consolidate all of that and organize it into a comprehensive survival process for it for all people.

Philip P. Arnold (00:56:39):

Yeah. That's really it, right? So how do we do that? How do we take this... We got the 200th anniversary of Johnson v. M'Intosh next year.

Oren Lyons (00:56:51):

Yeah, yeah.

Philip P. Arnold (00:56:52):

And that codifies it all into law, US law.

Oren Lyons (00:56:56):

Well, that was the whole thing. I mean, once the church, the Catholic Church, had made that astounding decoration that they owned the world and so forth, their counterparts, which had separated from them and become their own, which was in the King of England, they said, "Well, we have the same authority, so we'll say we own the world as well." So then in 1996, you had that, or 1496, you had that statement from them to the Cabots to go out and to-

Philip P. Arnold (00:57:40):

Yeah, Henry VII, England.

Oren Lyons (00:57:45):

... go out and lay claim to, they're part of this new world. But for Christians collectively, it was, "Okay, well let's work together. Let's not fight too much each other," and they were setting up rules at how they would take over the whole... And have no discussion about the people who actually lived there, us,

the original people, no discussion whatsoever. And categories, put us in a category of neither human or not human, and kept us there for 500 years. It was at this Doctrine of Discovery, this discussion that we were having was the emergence of us as a people, and that was what Steve brought. He said, "Here we are." So I had a contact with some very strong people in the Congress and the Senate, and I sent a message to them about 1492, "Hey, what are you guys going to do with this? Where do you want us to stand and have this celebration?"

(00:59:16):

And so we sent a delegation down in Washington as part of that delegation with that question. And they said, "What are you guys doing here?" We said, "You're going to have a 200 anniversary, and you're not going to invite the people that did it for you, what are you talking about?" And so we decided out a previous meeting that we were going to organize for this event, and this meeting took place in New York City. And they was sponsored in, supported financially by a musician, and he... Little Stevie, Stevie Van Zandt, he's the one that paid for our Native people to come to New York City to have a meeting. And we decided at that meeting that were two things we had to do. One was we had to be there at the 200 anniversary in some form or other, that we had to write a book about how this came about, and that we had to get a law passed that would recognize that. That's what we decided we had to do. So the book that came out was Land of the Free-

Philip P. Arnold (01:00:57):

Exiled in the Land of the Free.

Oren Lyons (01:00:58):

They were Exile in the Land of the Free, which is very powerful book.

Sandy Bigtree (01:01:02):

Certainly is.

Oren Lyons (01:01:05):

And that was a compilation of statements from the leadership of the times, and that was our friend Tom Murrell, who published that, who made that possible. And also, we had to get the original 1940 Indian law. We had to get the original book and needed to get it out because in that 1940 book of Indian law-

Philip P. Arnold (01:01:43):

Is that Felix Cohen?

Oren Lyons (01:01:46):

Pardon me?

Philip P. Arnold (01:01:47):

That's Felix Cohen, that book?

Oren Lyons (01:01:49):

Yeah. Felix Cohen Handbook, Federal Indian Law has been edited five times, taking out all of the supportive and recognition of Native authority.

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Philip P. Arnold (01:02:08):

Really?

Oren Lyons (01:02:09):

Five times has been edited.

Philip P. Arnold (01:02:10):

That's interesting.

Sandy Bigtree (01:02:12):

Wow.

Oren Lyons (01:02:14):

So Tom Murrell, I said, "Tom, we're going to get that, the original copy, and we have to get it into the hands of every senator, congressman." And he found the original copy he had it remade, had it published and handed it out to each and every one of those senators and congressmen, 1940.

Sandy Bigtree (01:02:38):

1940 edition.

Oren Lyons (01:02:40):

Yep, because-

Sandy Bigtree (01:02:40):

The original.

Oren Lyons (01:02:43):

... by 45, they were starting to edit us out of it. And that editing was done by Indian people, Indian colleagues, Indian scholars, so to speak. They were helpful to that. So all of that...

Philip P. Arnold (01:03:07):

Wow.

Oren Lyons (01:03:08):

All of that was taking place, and we were involved and then to the other, and the Onondaga Council of Chiefs and the clan mothers were supportive 100%, all the time. All the time, and the Six Nations, strong coalition.

Philip P. Arnold (01:03:29):

It's remarkable.

Jordan Loewen-Colón (01:03:34):

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The producers of this podcast for Adam DJ Brett and Jordan Brady Loewen. Our intro at outro is social dancing music by Oris Edwards and Regis Cook. This podcast has produced a collaboration with the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University's Department of Religion, and the Indigenous Values Initiative.